

NATIONAL REVIEW

Covering Terrorism

Tracking the media.

By William McGowan — May 15, 2003

In the days immediately after the September 11 attack, intelligence and law-enforcement officials made plain that holes and weaknesses in the immigration system were major keys to the terrorists' success. The lapses they cited involved dysfunction and corruption in the visa-issuance process, a failure to monitor student visa holders and poor controls on visa overstays. Other shortcomings included illegal access to state driver's licenses useful in establishing false identities, and municipal "sanctuary" policies that protect illegal immigrants by barring local police from communicating with their state and federal counterparts and with the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

PLAYING CATCH-UP

This news was not surprising to immigration reformers who had long tried to bring media attention to these problems so that the government might do something about them. Yet before 9/11, the press had not taken adequate notice. The romantic pro-diversity script that governed so much of the reporting and analysis about immigration before the attack made such lapses seem unimportant. The mentality required to see how much these shortcomings in the system made us vulnerable to concerted terrorist effort was simply not there.

September 11 was a huge wake-up call for journalists, causing priorities to shift quickly and dramatically. In the weeks immediately following the attack, almost all major newspapers and networks — including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Los Angeles Times*, ABC News, and NPR — played a fast game of catch-up. Most mainstream journalistic outlets produced a barrage of reports showing how weaknesses in the immigration system, including several noted above, contributed to the

terrorists' entry and effectiveness.

The reporting was also marked by unprecedented explorations of other facets of the immigration system, not exploited by the 9/11 hijackers but there for other terrorists to take advantage of: the ease with which immigrants ordered to be deported from the country can “abscond,” for example, and the nature of the criminal activities and arcane money-laundering mechanisms that Muslim terrorists have used to finance themselves here.

Editorial policies underwent an attitude correction, too. Editorial writers at the *New York Times*, for instance, even touted provisions of the 1996 Immigration Reform Act, which the paper had earlier attacked broadly — though carefully ignoring their own role in the neutering of these reforms. The *Times* also now called for increasing security along our “porous borders,” after years of reporting and commentary shot through with the assumption that illegal immigration was nothing much to worry about (as in the *Times Magazine* article entitled: “What Immigration Crisis?”).

PLAYING IT SAFE

But while the terrorist attack should have left an indelible impression, it was not the sweeping “transformation in our consciousness” that Geoffrey Wheatcroft, writing in the *Times Book Review*, has called it. A reflexively pro-diversity newsroom climate persists. Although the press has been willing to say that our immigration protections are in deep disarray, it has shown little inclination to highlight how a reduction in the flow of immigrants is critical to regaining the control we once had. The pro-diversity script also survives in the form of overly favorable coverage on the subject of Arab and Muslim Americans, who have become the objects du jour of journalistic piety and skittishness, and on the nature of Islam and the role it should play in American public life. Although many American Muslims were appalled by the terrorist attack, a larger number than has been admitted have expressed approval or insisted that it be seen “in context.” Those who warn about a foreign-born “fifth column” may have been overwrought, but September 11 and subsequent events seemed to underscore that we needed to watch our backs as much as our borders.

Some news organizations, in the first flurry of post-attack reporting, found some disturbing evidence of questionable Muslim loyalty. The *Washington Post*'s Marc Fisher, for example,

went to an Islamic school just outside of Washington, D.C., and reported on the feelings of one South Asian eighth grader who said that “Being an American means nothing to me. I’m not even proud of telling my cousins in Pakistan that I’m American.” As jarring and as prevalent as these sentiments were, some news organizations preferred not to see them or interpret them for what they were. In contrast to the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* chose to focus on an Islamic academy in New York where the curriculum was only nominally Islamic, the message being that Americans had little ground for fear or mistrust.

When the *New York Times* did highlight stark anti-American attitudes, they were viewed through the lens of cultural relativism. Case in point: another Times piece on attitudes of Muslim teenagers in another private Islamic academy, this one in Brooklyn. According to the reporter, Susan Sachs, some of the Pakistani, Egyptian, Yemeni, and Palestinian immigrant teens interviewed for this piece have little feeling for their new nation, and they think the ideal society would follow Islamic law, making no separation between religion and state. One 17-year-old boy, for instance, said he would support any leader he determined to be an observant Muslim who was fighting for an Islamic cause, even if that meant abandoning the United States or going to jail to avoid U.S. military service. Other students expressed “empathy for the young Muslims around the world who profess hatred for America and Americans.” Yet instead of seeing these sentiments as worrying examples of dual loyalty (in effect, no loyalty), Sachs tepidly described them as a sign of the “strain” that immigrants and their children traditionally can feel “between their adopted and native culture.”

More active, adult terrorist sympathizers have gotten easy treatment, too. When most of the prominent Muslims invited to the White House just after 9/11 were identified as known sympathizers with terrorist causes in the Middle East, the story and its implications got little play. The *Times* mentioned that before September 11, “incendiary anti-American messages” were long a “staple” at some Muslim events, but said the attack had prompted influential American Muslim clerics to “temper their tone.” The story of incendiary rhetoric should have been done long ago, however; and the persistent militancy of some of these clerics post-9/11 — despite any tone-tempering directives — has not been a reporting priority. The journalistic mainstream has also been reluctant to do the investigative work required to establish that mosques are not being used in some cases as recruiting grounds or

sanctuaries for terrorists, even though the FBI has shown that past terror plotters used such houses of worship for those purposes.

Islam in the West is a complicated phenomenon, with both benign and belligerent faces. Yet an NBC News report in October 2001 declared Islam to be strictly “a religion of peace,” veiling its more aggressive and violent side. And while there are many American Muslims who are Islamic in name only — “cultural” Muslims, as the *New York Times* described them, similar to secular Jews — the most ascendant strain of institutional Islam in America takes its force from radical Wahhabism, which is dominated by extremist and radical clerics who have no record of promoting loyalty to America or peace with entities deemed enemies of Islam.

A late autumn 2001 story in the *New York Times* announced that a high-ranking Muslim chaplain in the U.S. Army had been counseling Muslim soldiers that it was indeed morally right for them to fight and kill fellow Muslims from hostile nations. But the story neglected to bring the issue of Muslim servicemen’s resistance to fighting fellow Muslims down to the ground by examining just how demoralizing and divisive the issue has been for quite some time, particularly in units where Muslims serve in substantial numbers.

LOOKING INTO THE GAP

A sidebar story that could be done, and has not been, is the significant under-representation of Muslims in the services. (According to the Pentagon, there are only 4,000 Muslims in the entire armed forces, in a country with a Muslim population now edging toward four million.) This severe under-representation could serve as a journalistic springboard to discuss the problem of dual loyalty or Muslim resistance to “Americanization,” but it has not. Rather, the *Times* ran an analysis spotlighting high rates of enlistment among young immigrant New Yorkers, carefully avoiding the larger issue of disproportionately low national enlistment rates among Muslim newcomers.

Indeed, the whole issue of Muslim and Arab immigrant assimilation has been given only the most glancing attention, and stories bearing directly on the dreaded subject of dual loyalty have been almost entirely ignored. As John Leo, one of the few clear voices on this problem, has written, “We need a serious discussion about loyalty and assimilation.” What we have gotten instead, Leo says, is a “massive cloud of hands off nonjudgmentalism.”

The story that most underscored the press's inability to discuss Muslim loyalty occurred in September 2002 and involved six young Muslim American men in the Buffalo suburb of Lackawana charged with providing material support to al Qaeda terrorists. According to the government, these young men — all U.S. citizens, five out of six born in America — had traveled to Afghanistan just before the 9/11 attacks and had received training from al Qaeda military operatives, who taught them how to fire rifles. They had also heard indoctrination lectures, including one by Osama bin Laden himself. According to the government, these men were then sent home to America to await activation orders. (It should be noted that when CIA officials used an unmanned drone to shoot missiles at a high-ranking al Qaeda operative in Yemen in November 2002, a man who was riding alongside him in the car was a foreign-born Yemeni-American said to be the recruiter for the Lackawana cell.)

While hardly conclusive, the evidence that the government presented in bail hearings was not unpersuasive. The men gave contradictory accounts of where they had traveled, with some admitting to going to Afghanistan while others maintained they had merely gone to Pakistan for religious instruction. At least one of the men looked as if he might have engineered the loss of his passport to avoid raising red flags. When their homes were searched, the government found that one of the men had numerous social security numbers and credit cards in several names. The government also had ominous e-mail messages. "The next meal will be very huge," one message said, an allusion to an upcoming attack. "No one will be able to withstand it, except those with faith." Most significantly, the men kept their secret for more than a year, even after September 11. Although the government would surely have benefited from hearing about where they had been and what they had learned about al Qaeda while there, they remained silent. In January 2003, one of the six Lackawana men pleaded guilty to providing support to a foreign terrorist organization, which will help federal authorities in the prosecution of the other cell members.

Besides the immediate factual issues, the case raised disturbing questions about the workings of the assimilation process for Third World immigrants in insular places like Lackawana's Yemeni community. More importantly, it raised the issue of divided loyalties. To some, it suggested the nightmare scenario: a "fifth column" of Muslim Americans more loyal to a religious vision than to the secular ideal of their homeland, with intimate

knowledge of the operations of our mortal enemies, as well as a community which might have known about the suspicious activity but did not inform authorities. John Leo asked: “Does the nation have a right to expect that Muslim Americans will report any such activity they happen to observe?”

Reporters have an obligation to subject the government’s case to as much skepticism and scrutiny as the defense arguments of the accused. But in covering the bail hearings of the so-called Lackawana Six, most coverage tended to favor the defense arguments that the six were “all-American boys” who had merely been caught up in a religious misadventure. Echoing her Yemeni immigrant sources, whom she seemed to agree with, one NPR reporter strained to assure us that even if the men did go to Afghanistan, they didn’t go with bad intentions. Reporters also seemed unduly swayed by defense claims that the government was on a witchhunt to find “another John Walker Lindh” and that racism and ethnic profiling were at the bottom of it all.

In the days immediately following the arrests, news organizations went out the gate fast and hard with reports that accented the men’s supposed innocence. ABC News depicted them as cordial and kindhearted members of the wider Lackawana community, reporting that one had been voted Most Friendly in high school. ABC News also reported that another taught troubled kinds and a third was the doting father of two boys.

Print reporting from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* bore the same exculpatory tendencies, with testimony from sources that could hardly be considered objective or balanced in their views. The mother of one suspect said that she knows her son, that he is a good boy and that “everyone is telling lies.” The local imam, whose mosque was used by visiting fundamentalists when they came to Lackawana to recruit the men to go abroad for “religious instruction,” insisted that when it was all over, the government would be apologizing to the boys. A piece by Michael Powell of the *Washington Post* quoted a local public school superintendent who explained that people in the Yemeni community “think the arrests were a mistake or a political act by the Bush administration to stir up an attack on Iraq.” The piece also quoted a friend of the suspects who said, “If they drove over an animal on the highway, they’d stop and give it CPR. These guys would not know how to kill anyone.”

One of the more scrambled efforts to throw doubt on the government's charges came in the NPR reporting. In the days right after the arrests were announced, information from other, more rigorous organizations was filtering in that the men had in fact visited al Qaeda training camps. But NPR correspondent Jackie Northam chose to feature a historian from the University of California at Davis who explained that the men had been recruited by a completely apolitical religious proselytizing group called "Tablighi Jamaat," who were about as dangerous as Jehovah's Witnesses. The group did emphasize "jihad," the historian explained, but it was the "jihad of self" with no links to violence. While this may be true of this movement in general, the fact that Northam would shift to such exculpatory background reporting instead of acknowledging a growing body of evidence that the men were involved in al Qaeda training networks suggests a "see no evil" approach to reporting.

Five of the six men arrested in Lackawana were native-born American citizens; the other was foreign-born, but had naturalized. Yet the community itself seemed to straddle some kind of cultural no-man's land where Americanization took a back seat to the self-conscious retention of traditional ways. The process of assimilation that makes foreign immigrants into Americans in other places seemed to work quite weakly in that insular place, if it worked at all.

Some news organizations were able to describe what that lack of assimilation meant. The *Buffalo News*, for instance, described the Yemeni side of Lackawana as "A piece of ethnic America where the Arabic-speaking Al-Jazeera television station is beamed from Qatar through satellite dishes to Yemenite American homes; where young children answer 'Salaam' when the cell phone rings, while older children travel to the Middle East to meet their future husband or wife; where soccer moms don't seem to exist, and where girls don't get to play soccer — or as some would say, football."

To its credit, the *New York Times* told how "The sense of having a foot in two worlds is common among the residents of Yemeni descent." The story continued: Many of the young men in the neighborhood and some girls have been sent back to live with relatives in Yemen as part of their families' continuing struggle to connect their American offspring to their roots. It is also common for young men, including some of those involved in the terror case, to go to Yemen to select a wife.

The tradition has the effect of bringing a constant infusion of religious and socially conservative Yemeni culture to Lackawana, where it exists in uneasy partnership with the temptations of American life.

Yet still, somehow, the reporting continued to emphasize the suspects' "All-American" qualities. The effects that the vast cultural differences between the Yemeni community and mainstream America might have on their level of loyalty to America were largely ignored.

Another area of significant miscoverage is the purported increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes, harassment and discrimination. Headlines trumpeted: "Tough but Hopeful Weeks for the Muslims of Laramie"; "Isolated Family Finds Support and Reasons to Worry in Illinois"; "Parents Fear Their Children Will Be Targets of Bigotry." In the first few months after the attack, not a day passed that there was not some kind of major story in the *New York Times* highlighting victimized Middle Easterners during this time of "anti-Muslim fervor," as Jodi Wilgoren of the *Times* called it, and the networks were quick to follow suit. Of course, the press was right to report on this problem, especially in the cases — few but fiendish — where hate crimes, including murder, did occur. But a very strong argument can be made that the issue got far more attention than the evidence dictated, and that reporters were lax in verifying the truthfulness of some presumed victims.

A mid-October 2001 *Times* story, "Christian Arabs, Too, Are Harassed," by Gustav Niebuhr, was built on nothing but claims of harassment, citing no police reports and referencing the experience, relayed third-hand, of one Arab teenager taunted at school for looking "like Osama." In fact, the piece closed by quoting an Arab-American academic in Cleveland who said that people had actually been more sympathetic to Arabs since September 11. This was confusing and contradictory, at best, and made one wonder how closely the headline writer, under pressure to make the piece fit an approved script, actually read Niebuhr's copy.

Another *Times* story, by Somini Sengupta, closed ominously with an anecdote relayed second-hand about an Indian-American who, the source said, was "chilled to the bone" in the process of parking his car "by a volley of threats and insults from a white man who had stepped out of his house" in New Jersey. There were also a raft of newspaper and network stories built around complaints from Arab cab drivers and local Arab political leaders of

verbal abuse by passengers and callers — and not much more.

Other harassment reports are pure “cry wolf,” such as the case of Ahmad Saad Nasim, a student at Arizona State University. Two days after 9/11, Nasim claimed to have been attacked by a gang of white assailants who screamed, “Die, Muslim, die!” The claim was given considerable state and national media coverage and caused more than fifty fearful Muslim students to leave the ASU campus. But when police questioned Nasim after he was found bound and gagged in a university library, he confessed to having fabricated the first assault, and then staging the library incident as well — a confession that did not get anywhere near the attention given to the original “hate” attack.

Some of the reported “hate crimes” were actually crimes committed by immigrants against their own. A case of murder involving a Somali man who was found bludgeoned to death on a bridge in a rural county in Washington State automatically set off accusations by rights organizations that hate was at the root. As it turned out, this alleged victim of hateful Americans was actually beaten to death by fellow Somalis. After a night of drinking, they had grown angry at him when he urinated on the floor of a drug dealer’s house and tried to walk out with a pocketful of the dealer’s music CDs.

To be fair, there was some isolated corrective reporting that undermined the anti-Muslim storyline. In January 2002, four months after the harassment theme took root, Alan Cooperman of the *Washington Post*, for instance, reported that federal law-enforcement officials had gone through nationwide crime data associated with the charge of anti-Muslim hate crimes and found the evidence lacking. Wrote Cooperman: “The notion that there has been a rash of retaliatory murders across the country, some investigators say, is an urban myth driven by anti-discrimination campaigners, sensational media reports and traumatized crime victims seeking some explanation for senseless acts of violence.” The same held for nonviolent acts of discrimination too.

In June, the *New Jersey Law Journal* analyzed the evidence and concluded that anti-Muslim incidents were quite rare. It quoted one anti-discrimination lawyer who said that in the realm of anti-Muslim bias, “basically we are not seeing anything.”

Yet the storyline endures, as Arab-American rights organizations continue to publicize

erroneous claims and much of the media, like the *New York Times*, continues to echo them, without adding the important caveat that many of the cases cited in these accusations simply lack merit. Like the largely press-created “epidemic” of black-church burnings in 1996, the so-called “spasm of anti-Muslim fervor” was based on reporting that had no foundation. Just as in that earlier case, it was a storyline used by racial activists to advance an agenda that the press’s unexamined emotional and political “givens” made them more than ready to amplify.

The alleged erosion of constitutional protections, especially in the case of immigrant Arabs — some legal, some illegal — detained in the anti-terrorist crackdown is another story slathered thick with politically correct pieties. As civil libertarians press their case that the detention of Arab immigrants represents a violation of core American freedoms and abuse of government authority, news organizations have often echoed them, ignoring important legal distinctions that courts have affirmed between rights of citizens and resident aliens and those of visa holders and the undocumented.

FALSE VICTIMOLOGY

In a week when it could have done some investigative reporting about the manhunt for the one hundred terrorist suspects the FBI couldn’t locate at the time, or about the issues associated with detainees who would not cooperate, the October 21, 2001, *New York Times Magazine* preferred to run a 3,000-plus-word piece about the “Kafkaesque” ordeal of a “soulful”-eyed Saudi radiologist in Texas who spent 13 days in federal detention before being released with no charges. This was a revealing example of journalistic priorities. Worse, though, was the credulousness — or calculation — of *Times* reporter Deborah Sontag. The Texas director of the ACLU told her that the radiologist’s detention “makes those of us Arabs and Muslims who are American think, ‘Are we living in a country as dirty as the ones we ran from?’ “

The same credulousness could be seen a year later, in reporting that continued to dwell on how inhospitable America had become to new Muslim immigrants and visitors. One such offended guest was the son of a Muslim diplomat who had overstayed his visa by six weeks and had spent the same amount of time in jail after a sweep. According to the *New York Times*, this man declared that he was now glad to leave. “I don’t want to be here anymore, anyway,” he huffed. Left unsaid, however, was how this sentiment squared with the fact

that added security and widened law-enforcement powers have had no impact at all on the rate of visa requests from the Muslim countries in question. News stories spotlighted the impatience of visa seekers peeved at the added waits imposed by new security-screening measures, while data showed that immigration rates were not slowing at all since 9/11.

The *Los Angeles Times* wasn't far behind in victimology either, running a sob-sister piece on October 7 about three illegal-alien Yemeni siblings innocently caught up in the sweep, one of whom had been in the country for twelve years and had been defying a deportation order since April. "It was beyond humiliation," the fugitive's 23-year-old sister said, referring to the way the neighbors looked into the open front door of their shared apartment as officers came and went. Later at the detention facility, she was initially denied the right to wear her veil. "I lost my dignity right there," said the woman. The fugitive brother had been listed on insurance papers as a second driver for a car rented by a material witness in the World Trade Center investigation. Still, the *Times* made it seem as if it was ridiculous that the three were ever detained — and dangerous that they might be sent back to Yemen, where they "could suffer retribution for their Western ways."

Indeed, stories in the first few months after the attack dwelling on the supposed ineffectiveness of the dragnet ("Hundreds of Arrests, but Promising Leads Unravel" — *New York Times*) might have spoken less to the innocence of the detainees than to the impossibility of fighting terrorist cells under current legal rules of engagement, which bar interrogation tactics that other nations employ. Stories disparaging the dragnet's usefulness at that early stage also didn't account for the fact that even with these restrictive rules, the FBI believed it had disrupted several additional terrorist operations and might even be holding up to ten al Qaeda members.

Media antagonism to the government's terror-fighting tactics was most pronounced in reference to "ethnic profiling." There was undeniable evidence that had the FBI allowed its Phoenix office to investigate the suspicious number of Arab immigrants who were taking flight training there (and elsewhere) and not balked at what it considered ethnic profiling, the plot surrounding the 9/11 attacks might have been exposed. There was also evidence that the media's anti-profiling impulses, a reflection of broader PC anxieties, had played a role in shaping the climate that made FBI supervisors in Washington wary of allowing the Phoenix FBI office to proceed. As Nicolas Kristof of the *New York Times* put it in a rare

moment of institutional self-criticism, “As long as we’re pointing fingers [at FBI lapses], we should look in the mirror.” Yet most of the reporting and commentary on this issue was hostile to ethnic profiling, even as no one really ever explained how any kind of effective preventative screening could take place without it.

Some of the most absurd rhetoric involved the parallels drawn between any kind of Arab ethnic profiling and the internment of Japanese Americans in World War II. The parallels originated in editorial columns and commentary but also made their way into news reporting and news analysis as well.

Detaining Middle Eastern visitors, including many who are in violation of their visa status, is a far cry from the ugly act of putting Japanese-American citizens away for the duration. Yet repeatedly, we heard moral equivalence.

One piece that underscored the way this unfounded notion drove much of the reporting was produced by Robert E. Pierre of the *Washington Post*. Pierre traveled to Dearborn, Michigan, to report on the mounting fears of the city’s large Arab-American community, who according to one source were “scared to death” of being wrongly accused of terrorist associations. This community’s American roots go back several generations. But Dearborn was also a place where authorities found what a federal indictment labeled a “sleeper operational combat cell,” which was planning attacks in the United States, recruiting members, seeking to obtain weapons and manufacturing false identification papers. Making no mention of the arrests of several of the cell’s members just after September 11, Pierre instead focused on the near-hysterical anxieties of the town’s Arab Americans, who see themselves as one major attack away from internment. Pierre closed his piece with a statement by one Arab American: “Arabs who live in this country are Americans too. Haven’t we learned anything since World War II? Sometimes I don’t think so.”

THE ORIGINAL SCRIPT

As the PC script resumed, the reportorial rigor that was evident in the attack’s initial aftermath dissipated, particularly with respect to the institutional dysfunction of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Gradually, the press has put less and less emphasis on the connection between 9/11-style terrorism and problems in the immigration process. This was underscored most dramatically in the marked refusal to look at facts surrounding

the INS's release of D.C. sniper suspect John Lee Malvo, an illegal immigrant from Jamaica. The 17-year-old Malvo had been smuggled into the United States as a stowaway, most likely through John Allen Muhammed, his 41-year-old partner in the sniping spree. Records show that Malvo and his mother, also an illegal immigrant, were taken into local police custody in Bellingham, Washington, after the mother and John Muhammed fought over the boy at the homeless shelter where the two men were living. Malvo and his mother were both ordered detained, in keeping with provisions of federal immigration law which holds that stowaways should be deported immediately without the usual hearing available to illegal aliens who have entered the country by other means. But top-level INS officials in Washington State overruled the Border Patrol and ordered that John Lee Malvo and his mother be released on bond pending a hearing into their case.

This decision represented a violation of federal law and exposed a chronic rift between the Border Patrol, which generally wants laws to be enforced, and a highly politicized and overwhelmed INS hierarchy, which stands credibly accused of having given up on carrying out its sworn responsibilities to ensure the integrity of border controls and immigration procedures.

With the stakes so high and the implications so obvious, one might have expected mainstream news organizations to go after the INS for releasing Malvo, and to have examined the structural weaknesses, the policies and the poor decision-making behind this release. Amazingly, however, with the exception of Fox News, almost every major news organization in the country refused to delve into the matter in any depth at all. While these organizations reported Malvo's detention and his release on bond pending a hearing, none of the majors examined what an egregious lapse the release represented and how that agency's dysfunctional decision-making could come back to haunt the country on a far bloodier scale sometime in the future if these failures remain unaddressed.

The skewed journalism surrounding 9/11, especially its immigration-related aspects, has had adverse real-world consequences. As much as some reporting has spurred an overdue tightening of the immigration net on some level, overall our media has failed to probe the consequences of our confused and contradictory policies. The lack of rigor in this journalism has in some ways obscured the nature and source of the threat (militant Islam) as well, and what we should do to blunt that threat. Finally, I think it has diluted our moral

outrage, contributing to a drift back into the indifference and apathy that made us vulnerable in the first place.

Whether September 11 should prompt a broad rewriting of immigration policy and procedures is the subject of a fierce ongoing debate. On one side are those favoring as open a system as possible, who claim the borders need not be closed, even after 9/11, and that law-enforcement and intelligence agencies already have the tools to fight terrorism if they would just do their jobs well. On the other side are restrictionists, insisting that American citizens have a right to protection from the depredations of noncitizens and that limitations on immigration, including a more selective approach to certain Middle-Eastern nationals, are the only way to ensure that protection.

In the year or so since 9/11, the failure of the terrorists to mount another catastrophic attack has helped immigration defenders to argue for keeping the borders as open as possible. Another big attack, however, would undoubtedly favor restrictionists. One thing is clear right now, though: The record shows that a politically correct absence of rigor before the attack undercut the watchdog role that the press should have been playing on immigration. Despite the calamity that has befallen us, too much of a PC sensibility has endured, along with the blind spots and the victimology it fosters.

— *William McGowan is the author of Coloring the News: How Crusading for Diversity Has Corrupted American Journalism. This piece is adapted from the new epilogue to the paperback version of Coloring The News. The Coloring the News website, complete with reviews and commentary, can be found at www.coloringthenews.com. McGowan previously wrote about press coverage of the war on terror in November 2001.*